



## **Questions & Answers on the NOAA Fisheries Service Decision Not to Conduct Endangered Species Act Status Reviews of Puget Sound Copper & Quillback Rockfish (January 2007)**

**Q. Why is NOAA Fisheries Service considering whether to review the status of Puget Sound copper and quillback rockfish under the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA)?**

- A. On Sept. 18, 2006, we received a petition from Sam Wright to list copper and quillback rockfish in Puget Sound under the ESA. Any person can petition the Secretary (of Interior or Commerce) to list or delist a species under the ESA. Within 90 days after receiving a petition, if possible, the Secretary must make a finding as to whether the petition presents substantial scientific or commercial information indicating that the petitioned action may be warranted. If a petition is found to present such information, the Secretary must promptly begin to review the status of the species concerned.

**Q. Why did NOAA Fisheries reject the petition to review the status of Puget Sound copper and quillback rockfish under the ESA?**

- A. After a careful review of the information presented in the petition, and of information available in agency files, we concluded that the petition fails to present substantial scientific and commercial information indicating that the petitioned actions may be warranted.

**Q. Didn't NOAA Fisheries Service already review these rockfish and other Puget Sound marine fish species under the ESA?**

- A. Yes. As a result of a petition filed by Mr. Wright in 1999 to list 18 species of marine fishes in Puget Sound, we initiated ESA status reviews for seven of the petitioned species, including copper and quillback rockfish. In April 2001 we concluded that copper and quillback rockfish in Puget Sound did not warrant ESA listing. Although these rockfish populations had experienced declines over the last 40 years, likely due to overharvest, we noted that the populations now appear stable, and that improved fishery regulations and the establishment of marine reserves had reduced levels of fishing mortality.

**Q. What information is presented in the petition that was not available to NOAA Fisheries Service at the time of its 2001 status review?**

- A. The recent petition does not present any new status or trend information for these species that was not considered in our 2001 status review. The petitioner offers criticisms of the risk assessments we conducted in 2001, and presents information from scientific articles concerning related rockfish species published since our 2001 status review. We've concluded that these criticisms and recently published findings do not present substantial information indicating that the copper and quillback rockfish species are at risk, or that the findings of our earlier review warrant re-evaluation. We're aware that the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is conducting an assessment of the status of the subject rockfish species in Puget Sound, and that WDFW's review is likely to

contain updated abundance and trend data not considered in our 2001 status review. We'll review WDFW's updated status report when it becomes available.

**Q. Does the NOAA Fisheries Service finding mean that copper and quillback rockfish and other marine fish stocks in Puget Sound are healthy?**

- A.** Not necessarily. Although we concluded in our 2001 status review that copper and quillback rockfish and other species in Puget Sound do not warrant protection under the ESA, we noted that some local populations may require special management actions outside the context of the ESA. We also stated that available information suggested that rockfish and other marine fish stocks are reduced from historical levels, and that these reductions are likely related to a variety of human-induced impacts to the Puget Sound ecosystem. As noted above, fisheries managers in the state of Washington have implemented a number of conservation actions to protect and recover Puget Sound marine fishes, including restrictions on harvest and expanding the designations of marine protected areas. We'll continue to encourage these and other conservation efforts in Puget Sound to ensure the long-term health of these important marine resources.